

## A glimpse of glory

Luke 9:28-36

'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God,' said Jesus. That's where we left things last week. What did Jesus mean? Today, in Luke 9:28-36, we read on to see what Jesus was talking about.

If you could meet some great inspiring figures from history and ask them what their lives and teachings really meant, how would that change your life today? If you could glimpse into the future for just a moment to see how things were going to turn out, how would *that* change your life today?

In this episode, Jesus takes just three of His disciples - Peter, the one who has just publicly put His life in Jesus' hands; and James and his brother John - for a brief encounter with heroes of the past, and a little glimpse into the future.

They get to see and hear Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus about everything that the Old Testament was pointing towards. And they get to see Jesus in a transformed, lit up glory that gives them a glimpse into the undeniable Godly magnificence that all people will see in Him one day.

v.29 - 'As He (Jesus) was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.' v.32 - 'Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw His glory...'

Nobody else can say they've ever seen such a thing. And, because of that, and because this whole thing is all so supernatural, we could read it and think, 'Yeah, right.' Even as we read it, we read about Peter and his pals being sleepy, so we could write it all off as some kind of dream. I guess that's why we read at the end in v.36, 'The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no-one at that time what they had seen.'

They *would* tell people all about this day later on - once Jesus was raised from death to life, and people really grasped that this Jesus had the power that only God could have. They spoke about it when it made sense. Which is why we can read about it today.

Like every other passage we read in this book where we're tempted to go, 'Yeah, right...', we need to ask ourselves the question - why not? If Jesus is

who He claimed to be, if it's true that He's God and that He rose from death itself, why would it not be true that His appearance transformed into this glorious one and that He spoke with Moses and Elijah on a mountain?

It was a special privilege for these three guys (Peter, James and John) to have Jesus' true identity confirmed to them in this way. Peter had just declared that He believed Jesus was the King and Rescuer sent by God. But he probably hadn't grasped that this was God *Himself* - the Son of God, walking the Earth - until this episode.

Indeed, even in v.33, it's as though Peter *still* doesn't get who He's speaking to, despite this blinding display. He calls Jesus, 'Master' - like some human teacher or boss. God has to step in with an overwhelming cloud and a clear voice to spell it out for him - '*This is my Son...*'

Throughout the Bible, there are mountain-top experiences. Often, it's on the mountain that people meet with God and find Him to be real, living and present. It's on a mountain that Moses meets with God and hears from God's own lips how life is to be lived in the community of God's people.

It's on a mountain that Elijah has his showdown with the false prophets of a made up god called Baal, and where the people of Israel discover that the Lord, the God that Elijah serves, is the real and living God.

And it's here on a mountain that Peter, James and John see and hear that this man Jesus they have been following isn't just one of a number of great religious figures. And He isn't even just the one unique King and Rescuer sent by God for people to put their trust in. Jesus is *God Himself* - radiant in glory, and endorsed by the voice of God the Father.

Whatever else happens from this day forward - however surprising, confusing or apparently disappointing the events that these disciples will experience as Jesus heads towards rejection and death in Jerusalem - for Peter, James and John; it's all going to be seen through a new lens.

They have had a glimpse into the future. A peek at the glory that Jesus really has. Because of their mountain top experience, which teaches them who Jesus is and that it really will be alright in the end, they are made ready for the valleys they are about to enter.

And that's what is next for them. In the next passage, we're going to read about these guys coming down from the mountain, and entering a scene in

the valleys of pain, human suffering, doubt and spiritual conflict. The mountain top experiences are supposed to equip God's people for the valleys.

That's not what Peter wants. In v.33, not quite knowing what to say about the incredible scene before his eyes, he says to Jesus, 'This is great! Let me get some shelters to put up for you, Moses and Elijah! Let me sort it so that we can make this mountain top experience last as long as possible!'

Isn't that what we do, too? I don't imagine that any of us have seen what Peter, James and John did. But I know that amongst us, we've had a variety of experiences of the real, incredible presence of God.

I know that many of us can relate to the idea of the spiritual mountain top experience - a time and place where you could almost reach out and touch God, you were so close to Him... a particular worship service. An experience in your small group. A Scripture Union camp. An out-of-the-blue event. And we want to keep living in those experiences; keep them going as long as possible. We wish that life and faith could always be here on the mountain.

But that's not what God intends for Peter, James and John - or for us. The mountain top experience is not given to God's people for them to bottle and keep. It's given to equip them with confidence about God's presence and reality, so they can enter the valleys of human brokenness, everyday grind, and situations of deep distress.

The mountain top experiences are *for* the valley experiences. The extraordinary once-in-a-while, given for the ordinary everyday challenges. So we can go to work on Monday. So we can face the next life trauma around the corner. So we can work through the relationships that are bent out of shape. But so that we can do it all with great hope, knowing the glory of God that we're heading for experiencing in fullness one day.

*Can you recall a 'mountain top experience' of God's presence with you? How has that shaped your everyday life and faith?*

Let's have a look at vv.30-31. What are Moses and Elijah doing here speaking with Jesus? What are they speaking *about*? What does Luke want *us* to understand from all of that?

Moses and Elijah haven't just turned up randomly in this out-of-the-ordinary, past-meets-present-meets-future moment. Nor are they just there because of

their own impressive mark on history. They are there because of what they represent.

The Old Testament - that part of the Bible which describes what God has been doing in the world *before* Jesus' arrival in it - is often described in two parts - the Law and the Prophets.

The Law (which is especially the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), describes what God says about right and wrong, good and bad. It sets the standard for human life and community that God wants for life to exist and endure. Moses is the great figure from this part of the Old Testament - the one who received the law from God and had it written down for God's people to know and live out.

The Prophets were those who were sent by God to His people to declare God's messages to them. Messages about how they were failing to live according to God's law: how idols were being put in God's place as number one; how the poor and the powerless were being abused and overlooked; how greed and violence was destroying life and community.

Messages about God's condemnation and judgement on sin. And messages about how God would send a King and Rescuer to set God's people free. Elijah was the great prophet who represented all the things that these prophets came to say and do in the world.

So Moses and Elijah are there, pointing those watching to *Jesus*. They are there to show that the Law of the Old Testament, and the messages and actions of the prophets of the Old Testament, was all *pointing to Jesus*. Jesus was not a disconnected innovation of God's, nor was He a plan B. Moses and Elijah are talking with Jesus about the climax of the plan they were all a part of - and it's all centred *in Jesus*.

God's Law is too perfect for we human beings to live out. Israel couldn't do it. We can't do it. But Jesus could. And Jesus did. God's prophets spoke of One who was to come who would set God's people free. And Luke's been telling us that that's the mission Jesus has been setting about.

And it all comes to a head in this 'departure' that Moses and Elijah are speaking about with Jesus. A 'departure' that Jesus was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. What is that? This word 'departure' has a lot of meaning in it. In Greek, the word is... 'Exodus.' That will sound familiar to

those of you who know your Bibles. And it's no accident that Moses is here in the scene. Luke is telling us something.

Tom Wright explains: 'In the first Exodus, Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and home to the promised land. In the new Exodus, Jesus will lead all God's people out of the slavery of sin and death, and home to their promised inheritance - the new creation in which the whole world will be redeemed.'

This 'departure' that Moses, Elijah and Jesus are speaking about is an Exodus that Jesus will lead, and those who are following Him as leader will be part of. And this word 'departure' is not talking about crossing a border or heading on holiday. It's hinting at death. Jesus is going to lead an Exodus for God's people *in His death* at Jerusalem.

That's what Moses, Elijah and Jesus are talking about together. What the Old Testament (Law and Prophets), and the New Testament are together saying. It is by Jesus dying that those following Him will be set free. Free from condemnation for not living out God's Law. Free from guilt for sin, and free from the hold of death.

We're all going to pass through the waters of death. But those following Jesus through them will set their feet safely on the shore at the other side. That was God's plan, from beginning to end. The whole Bible is pointing to Jesus. Leading us on an Exodus. Setting us free. Through His death. Into life.

*If being a 'slave' means something's got a hold over you that you can't break out of on your own, what would make you trust someone else who promises to lead you out of it?*

As if Jesus changing appearance into this shining, glorious one isn't enough; there's Moses and Elijah appearing too, talking with Jesus as if He's the main story. And as if all that supernatural stuff isn't enough to communicate to Peter, James and John who Jesus really is, God spells it out all the more.

vv.34-35 - 'While he (Peter) was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him.'"

I asked myself what I always want to ask of any passage of the Bible - what's the main point that God is communicating to us here? Well, God pretty much

spells it out and paints it in the sky in this passage: *God is pointing us to Jesus*. In glimpses of glory. In all Scripture. And with His very voice.

First of all, in a glimpse of His true glory appearing - God shows us that Jesus is more than a man; He is *of Heaven*. Then, in this imagery of Moses and Elijah, the whole of God's Word all leading up to Jesus being the One who was going to fulfil it all.

And thirdly, God simply opens His mouth and declares it: 'This Jesus is *my Son*. I have chosen *Him*. Listen to *Him*. Not anyone else. I haven't appointed Buddha or Mohammed or Joseph Smith or Guru Nanak or anybody else to bring about my purposes for my precious human creations in this world. I have appointed *my Son Jesus*. That is who this man is - so *listen to Him*.'

Peter, James and John got to see and hear all this glaringly obviously, right before their eyes. We get to read what they told us about it, and went to their deaths affirming was true. We've to listen to *Jesus* - because that's what God always intended from Genesis onwards, and that's what's going to draw human beings and God together - not just for the odd mountain top experience, but forever.

Now, God is not telling these men to 'listen to Jesus' in the sense of 'hear what He's got to say, weigh up the claims He's making and decide if He is who He says He is.' That's one way of listening - the way that the disciples and others have been listening in the first eight chapters of Luke. The way that we're encouraging people to listen and consider in our Alpha course.

But we're past that here. Peter, James and John are at the stage of being very clear about knowing, believing and declaring that Jesus is the Son of God, the King and Rescuer, who will set people free. For them to 'listen to Jesus' is to learn from Him, be changed and corrected and reshaped by Him.

We see that happening in the rest of chapter 9. From vv.37 onwards, we're going to see the disciples getting it wrong in lots of ways - in their actions and attitudes, their understanding and their priorities. And we're going to see Jesus correcting these things. As they listen, they learn, change, grow - they become more like Jesus. More and more fitting in the family likeness.

We're going to see the disciples getting called out on things like this: Their overestimation of their own abilities. Their lack of grasping why the cross was necessary. Their attitudes in their relationships amongst each other being

motivated by who was the greatest of them. Their attitudes to people who aren't 'one of us' - both those who were expressing trust in Jesus' name in a different way to them, and in their anger at those who were rejecting Jesus.

All these things Jesus will call them out on and correct them about just in the few verses following God's clear command to them - '*Listen* to Jesus.' All these things, Jesus will call you and I out on and correct us about as they are found in our lives, too.

We'll only hear the corrections and become reshaped by Jesus' lead as we deliberately listen to Him, though. There's no point standing up and shouting, 'I believe in Jesus, He's God's Son and my Saviour,' if we're not going to then live a life of listening to Him, learning from Him and being led by Him.

So, yes, here I go again... It's the old 'Read your Bibles' summons that comes up quite predictably as a 'how will we apply this to our lives?' bit-at-the-end-of-the-sermon. Yes, let's read our Bibles to have God's priorities, attitudes and lead speak to our minds and hearts.

But it's more than that. To actually *listen* to Jesus' leading us through that will be to actually *change* as a result of it. To read our Bibles asking the question - 'what needs to change in our attitudes, actions, priorities, relationships and understanding as a result of listening to God here?'

That's something we can do in our own individual Bible reading. It's something we're going to do quite deliberately in our Life Group Bible studies, starting again this week. Listen to Jesus, to be changed by Jesus.

On the mountain, God said, 'Stop, look and listen. This is Jesus, my Son.' Sometimes, we're blessed with mountain top experiences where we can reach out and touch the truth of that. One day, that will be forever, but right now, they are only for a moment.

They're given to us for the valleys - to go and live our lives serving Jesus at work and home and college, in everyday living and everyday dying. Listening to Jesus all the way, being changed by Him more and more. Being fitted and shaped for the glory that we've glimpsed and that we're heading for, as Jesus leads us on our Exodus from sin and death, and into life.